



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## JEAN DE MAIRET.

The third and fourth decades of the seventeenth century, or more strictly speaking the years from 1625 to 1637, form a rather important period in the history of French literature. This is the time when the great Corneille makes his appearance and the "Académie française" is established. For this reason it is all the more striking that there exists, apparently, a great uncertainty concerning a number of the precursors and contemporaries of Corneille, not only with regard to chronology, but also as to their true merits. One of the poets of that time, about whom opinions seem to be divided as to his literary position and undecided as to the chronology, is Jean de Mairet, of Besançon, who lived from 1604 to 1684. The chief works which Mairet wrote, are in chronological order as follows :

Chryséide et Arimand, a tragi-comedy ; Sylvie, a pastoral ; Silvanire, also a pastoral, or as Mairet himself terms it, a *tragi-comédie pastorale* ; Duc d'Ossonne, a comedy ; Virginie, a tragi-comedy ; and the tragedies : Sophonisbe, Marc Antoine Soliman, and Roland furieux.

The dates of these dramas, that is, the years in which they were finished or for the first time performed on the stage, were formerly given according to the 'Histoire générale du théâtre français,' by the Parfaict Brothers, Claude and François, who published this useful work during 1745-1749. For more than a century the chronology established by Parfaict was considered authoritative ; and we find that Professor Adolf Ebert in his masterly work 'Entwicklungsgeschichte der französischen Tragödie' (Gotha, 1856), adheres strictly to the dates as given by Parfaict. But within the last ten years the following scholars : Professor Gaspary, formerly of the University of Breslau, and Vollmöller, sometime of the University of Göttingen ; Doctor Richard Otto, of Munich, and especially Doctor Ernst Dannheisser, Professor at the Realgymnasium of Ludwigshafen, have made new investigations which not only questioned, but overthrew the old chronology of Mairet.

This discrepancy regarding the dates of Mairêt's dramas, has arisen from the poet's remarks in the "Epistre comique", which he wrote as an introduction to the 'Duc d'Ossonne.' He says there: "J'ai commencé de si bonne heure à faire parler de moi qu'à ma vingt-sixième année je me trouve aujourd'hui le plus ancien de tous nos poètes dramatiques." In the same "Epistre" he says:

"Je composai ma *Chriséide* à seize ans, au sortir de philosophie, et c'est de celle-là et de *Sylvie* qui la suivit un an après que je dirais volontiers à tout le monde: *Delicta juventutis meae* ne reminiscaris. Je fis la *Silvanire* à vingt-quatre, *Sophonisbe* à vingt-cinq."

The *Duc d'Ossonne* was printed in 1636, and the writers on literature accepted Mairêt's statement that he was twenty-six years old as an exact one, and, therefore, arrived at the conclusion that the poet was born in 1610: this mode of reasoning we find illustrated in Nicéron's (*Mém.*, vol. xxv) article on Mairêt; however the Church Record of Besançon shows that Mairêt was born in 1604, and as we have to suppose that Mairêt knew, at least approximately, the date of his birth, we must charge him here with a falsehood. Now, to say simply that Mairêt gave his age six years less than it really was, I consider an assertion which, if upheld with consistency, will lead to conspicuous errors; for that reason the chronology established by Gaspary in his article in the *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*, v, (1881) p. 70 ss., cannot be sustained. The poet's object in misrepresenting the respective years in which his works were produced was to create the belief that he had written his masterpieces at a very early age. Dannheisser remarks correctly (cf. "Zur Chronol." etc., *Roman. F.*, V.) that Mairêt cared very little whether the year of his birth was 1604 or 1610. I go a step further and maintain that Mairêt himself did not expect that so late a date of his birth as 1610 would ever be accepted in good faith; for, if in reference to certain productions he thought that it were possible for him to deceive the world by representing himself, successfully, as six years younger than he actually was, why did he proclaim himself with reference to others of his works as being older than was necessary? — If Mairêt could dare announce himself as being twenty-six years old in 1636, and if Dannheisser is correct in giving, for example, 1634, as the date of the first representation of 'Sophonisbe,' why did the young genius so mod-

estly claim to have composed 'Sophonisbe' at the age of twenty-five? He should have held to be the author of this famous tragedy at the age of twenty-four!

Here we have, then, an inconsistency either on Mairet's side or on Dannheisser's part. The excuse which the latter gives, at the bottom of p. 50 in his article "Zur Chronologie" is very weak; he states there that Mairet had to modify his pretended age because a consistent procedure would have resulted in too tender an age for his first work, *Chryséide*. I think I have a better solution for the problem. It is not so difficult to misrepresent one's age by three or four years as by six; and I assert and will show in the following, that Mairet only wished to appear three or rather four years, younger than he actually was. If he intended to deceive, he must have had some plan by which to proceed, so as not to become entangled in contradictions. And on that supposition I believe I can show that the remarks which our poet makes about his age, lead to the years 1807-08 as the *pretended* date of his birth. Of course he never stated that year, but he very probably relied upon it in his misrepresentations.

In the following discussion I shall not refer to Parfait's chronology, because I consider it thoroughly disproved by Dannheisser.—Let us apply the date (1607-)1608 to Mairet's statement, "Je composai ma *Chryséide* à seize ans, au sortir de philosophie." Does not the year (1623-)1624 suit exactly as the one in which Mairet left college and came to the Duke of Montmorency? The date also harmonizes admirably with Mairet's remark in the Preface to 'Sidonie' which was finished 1640-41 (according to Dannheisser, "Zur Chronol.," p. 40). In this preface the poet announces that he is going to retire, after having worked for the stage for seventeen years: does this not place the beginning of his career in 1623-24?

"Sylvie suivit un an après" is the assertion of Mairet which assigns this *tragi-comédie*, according to my theory, to (1624-)1625. Dannheisser endeavors to prove that 'Sylvie' was written after 1623, that is, after Mairet had entered the service of Montmorency. I agree with this critic and I might add that the grateful praise which Mairet in the "Epistre comique" bestows upon the Duke for having fostered the poet's "Muse as she was still lying in the cradle," may just as well be applied to 'Sylvie' as to 'Chryséide'; for Mairet himself calls both works 'delicta

juventitus meae.' From the following the reader will see upon what I base my claim for the statement that 'Sylvie' was finished in the years (1624-1625).

Mairet maintains in the "Epistre familière à M. Corneille" that his Sylvia

"a brillé dans un temps que celles de M. Hardy n'étaient pas encore hors de la saison et que celles de ces fameux écrivains MM. de Racan et Théophile conservaient encore dans les meilleurs esprits cette puissante impression, etc."

In 1623 Hardy's 'Herrschaft über die Bühne' was broken; the expression 'pas encore hors de saison' would, therefore, be more applicable to (1624-)1625 than to 1626. And as to the 'Bergeries' and 'Pyrame et Thisbé,' they were certainly performed before 1623. Dannheisser admits even with regard to 'Chryséide': "Mairet mag die Erinnerungen an die Stücke Théophiles und Racan's im Theater in sich aufgenommen haben."

"Je fis la Silvanire à vingt et un" is Mairet's announcement concerning this pastoral poem. Dannheisser ("Zur Chronol.," p. 43) comes to the conclusion:

"So glauben wir denn auch ein neues Moment für Zeitbestimmung der *Mélite* gefunden zu haben, in der Weise, dass letztere erst dem Ende des Jahres 1630, *Sylvanire* dem J. 1630 zuzuweisen wäre."

This statement certainly adds to my suspicion that there is something daring in the establishment of proof on the part of this critic.

We see that by advocating so late a date as 1630 for 'Silvanire', one is obliged to assign Corneille's 'Mélite', at least, to the end of the year 1630. For it is certain that 'Mélite' followed 'Silvanire' (cf. Marty-Laveaux, iii, 70):

"Cependant il nous étale pour poèmes dramatiques parfaitement beaux: le Pastor Fido, la Filis de Scire et cette malheureuse *Silvanire* que le coup d'essai de M. Corneille terrassa dès sa première représentation."

But the date 1630 and certainly the latter part of 1630, for 'Mélite', seems to me a forced one; and from several points of view it is in opposition to the conclusions to which I have arrived.

Taschereau ('Hist. . . . de Corneille,' p. 7) states:

"Les frères Parfaict fixent la première représentation de *Mélite* à l'année 1629, et cette date se trouve confirmée par l'autorité d'un contemporain. Mairet, dans son épître dédicatoire des

Galanteries du duc d'Ossonne, après avoir cité Rotrou, Scudéry, Corneille et du Ryer, dit qu'il vient de les nommer d'après l'ordre de leurs débuts dans la carrière dramatique."

If we accept Mairet here as a truthful witness, Corneille appeared after Rotrou and Scudéry and before du Ryer.

With reference to Jean Rotrou we know the following:

a. *Mem. pour servir*, etc., vol. xvi: "Rotrou, né 1609. Le succès de l'Hypocondriaque encouragea l'auteur et il le fit imprimer (1631)";

b. Petitot ('Répert.', vol. I, p. 22): "Rotrou, né 1609; à dix-neuf ans (1628) il fit une tragédie intitulée 'Le Mort Amoureux' qui fut représentée à l'hôtel de Bourgogne où elle eut un grand succès";

c. Guizot, ('Corneille, etc.', p. 369): "l'Hypocondriaque a précédé *Mélite* tout au plus d'une année. L'Histoire du Théâtre français donne l'Année, 1628, pour la date de sa représentation."

I think this sufficient to enable us to accept the date for Rotrou's first work. And Marty Laveaux ('Œuvres, etc., i, 129) informs us that Scudéry composed his 'Ligdamon' when he was about to leave the service of the king, which he did not do before March, 1629. On the other side, Pierre du Ryer published his tragi-comedy 'Argenis et Poliarque' in 1630 ('Bibl. du th. fr.', Dresde, 1786).

What is more natural, now, than to accept 1629 as the year of Corneille's first appearance? And if '*Mélite*' was performed in 1629, '*Sylvanire*' could not have appeared later than that year. Once having established the date for '*Sylvanire*', it can be regarded simply an arithmetical task to find the date for the 'Duc d'Ossonne' and 'Virginie' (1631 and 1631); Mairet's own statement is a good guide as to the difference of time between the respective works; and I am gratified to see that Dannheisser ("Zur Chronologie," p. 51) remarks: "Das alles beweist, dass sich der Dichter (Mairet) bestrebt hatte, den Zeitunterschied zwischen seinen einzelnen Werken wahrheitsgemäss darzustellen."

Let us now turn to the most important work of Mairet, the 'Sophonisbe.' Mairet claims to have composed it when he was twenty-five years of age. The year 1633 suggests itself for more than one reason: When Corneille composed his 'Sophonisbe'

(in 1663; cf. Dannheisser: "Zur Chron.", p. 48), he remarked that Mairêt's work of the same name had now been performed on the stage for thirty years. The result of this comparison is 1633, a date which we also obtain through Petitot ('Rep.: Notice sur Rotrou,' p. 21): "La tragédie d'Hercule mourant parut trois ans après la fameuse Sophonisbe." Now in Nicéron (*Mém.*, vol. xvi) we notice: "Hercule mourant: 1636." Therefore Petitot's remark fixes the date 1633 for 'Sophonisbe'.

With reference to the other dramas I agree in the main with Dannheisser, or I might claim that this critic agrees with me, since from Soliman on he does not deviate from Parfaict by more than three to four years, a difference which I have observed throughout this essay. Following Dannheisser's example I give a list of the dates which I think to have established, as compared with this critic and Parfaict.

	PARFAICT	DANNHEISSER	BLUME.
Mairêt born	1604	1610*	(1607)-8*
Chryséide	1620	1625	(1623)-24
Sylvie	1621	1626	(1624)-25
Sylvanire	1625	1630	1629
Duc d'Ossonne	1627	1632	1631
Virginie	1628	1633	1632
Sophonisbe	1629	1634	1633

In order to estimate the literary position of Jean de Mairêt, we have to consider especially two of his works: the 'Silvanire' and the 'Sophonisbe.'

As to the contents, 'Silvanire' is nothing but an ordinary pastoral poem; it tells the simple love story of a poor shepherd Aglante and of a rich shepherd's daughter, Silvanire, who have to encounter various hardships before they can be united in marriage. But the work is important, because the three unities are observed in it, and because Mairêt has written a Preface to it in form of a poetic discourse. It is obvious that the author himself entertained great hopes as to the success of 'Silvanire' which he considered the first model of a regular French drama, and the Preface to which he thought would constitute a Code of Rules for dramatic art; he had the work published (1631) in a much more elaborate style than that of any similar French book of the time; the picture of the youthful poet is conspicuously

---

\*Pretended by Mairêt.

placed over the title on the frontispiece. But we must admit that in the seventeenth century 'Silvanire' was not considered an epoch-making drama: however, very learned modern writers on the French drama, such as Ebert, Lotheissen and du Méril express the opinion that Mairet, in the year 1625, when he wrote the 'Silvanire' according to the rules of the old classics, made the first important step toward introducing the classic drama into France.

An attempt to solve this contradiction has been made by a scholar who recently edited a reprint of 'Silvanire', as the tenth volume of the *Sammlung französischer Neudrucke*; the book is entitled: 'Jean de Mairet, Silvanire, Mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen herausgegeben von Richard Otto. Bamberg, 1890.' In his introduction, Dr. Otto maintains that the contradiction with regard to the appreciation of the historical literary value of 'Silvanire', is based on a wrong idea as to the chronological relation of Mairet's work to those of his contemporaries.

The conclusion which Dr. Otto draws from this chronological change (1730 instead of 1625) is very significant; namely, the appreciation of 'Silvanire' as a monument for the history of the Three Unities is to be changed. The editor states that in order to judge what part the 'Silvanire' played in that important episode of French literature, it is necessary not only to review the conflict between the advocates of literary liberty and those of literary discipline, but also to notice the causes which started the dispute about the Aristotelian rules of the drama.

Dr. Otto's exposition of the different comments and works on poetic art, of the gradual development of the belief in the Aristotelian rules, certainly renders the theory very probable that no single author either Pichou or Chapelain or Mairet, *established* any such laws, but that the rules developed in a natural way by the supremacy acquired by Italian over French poetry, due to the taste of a whole class of refined people. However, Dr. Otto seems to have been too eager when he applies the chronological change in such a manner as to take all credit away from our poet, nay, to stigmatize him as a plagiarist. Mairet cannot have copied anything of importance from the preface of Ogier to Schelandre's 'Tyr et Sidon', as the critic charges. At the time when 'Tyr and Sidon' appeared (1628), Mairet is supposed to have had the whole plan of his 'Silvanire' finished (according to



our chronology); and if later he really copied some expressions in writing the Preface, such procedure would not annul his merit of having observed the Three Unities in the 'Silvanire'. The plan of the work, or better the dramatic form, is what we ought to appreciate in the 'Silvanire'. Mairet had undoubtedly studied the Italian poets ever since Cardinal de la Valette and Count Carmail had asked him to write a pastoral poem according to Italian classic rules—(this was in 1626–27, I conclude)—and when in 1627, the fourth volume of the *Astrée*, containing the 'Silvanire' appeared, Mairet had yet, according to my chronology, more than a year left in which to apply the rules (which he knew by this time), to the fable taken from the Pastoral of d'Urfé. If at the time when he was preparing the work for the press, he did copy some learned expressions to be used in his Preface, we cannot admire a proceeding of the kind, but do not think such a mistake is of sufficient importance to justify the conclusion that the whole work had been copied. Of course, the Preface to 'Silvanire' is important as a discourse on poetic art; but are not the rules therein contained illustrated by the work itself, and was not the work finished before Mairet endeavored to explain the rules in some graceful manner?

As to Dr. Otto's remarks "Lagneau, Pichou and Isnard were those who in 1626 considered a theatrical work like *Filis de Scire* most worthy of imitation," I contend that these were not the first writers whose attention was led to Italian literature. We read in the critic's own introduction that since Chapelain's Preface to Marini's 'Adone' (1623) the interest in classic rules became more and more active. Cardinal de la Valette was one of the aristocratic circle that met at the house of Marquise de Rambouillet; and as we know from the 'Histoire de la Ville de Paris', *ii*, 1341 (cited by Dr. Otto) that the Cardinal was in Paris in 1626 and in 1627, is it not very suggestive to suppose that while on a visit to a friend, the Duke of Montmorency, he advised the young poet to write a classic pastoral? On this ground, I claim for Mairet's 'Silvanire' as much originality as Dr. Otto does for Pichou's 'Filis de Scire'. If 'Silvanire' did not meet with the *expected* success, it was owing to the explainable fact that Mairet had paid too much attention to external form with reference to the Unities.

If our poet had not written anything after 'Silvanire', it might

remain doubtful whether he worked independently or not: but Mairet vindicates himself; he studies the Italian models with keen comprehension; he follows up his notion of the Unities, and embodies his progressive ideas in his masterwork, the famous 'Sophonisbe'. The episode in Livy, where the story is told of the Carthaginian Hasdrubal's beautiful daughter Sophonisbe—how she marries, for the sake of her country, the King of the Massæsylians, Syphax; how after the defeat of Syphax, she becomes infatuated with Masinissa, the confederate of the Romans; her tragic end, as she takes the poisonous cup offered by her despairing lover—is a subject which has been treated by many dramatists. Before Mairet, six tragedies on Sophonisbe had appeared in France, but none of them equals the skillful composition of Mairet. The work is by no means that of a genius, but it is the outcome of the efforts of a talented poet, to suit the taste of the *beaux esprits*.

While Dr. Otto endeavors to present Mairet as a mere plagiarist, Dr. Dannheisser goes to the other extreme, and on the basis of the new chronology, established by him, claims that in Mairet the history of the French drama of that time is represented. His statement (*Zum Schlusskapitel*, p. 316): "In der Entwicklungsgeschichte keines einzigen Dichters, Corneille nicht ausgenommen, spiegelt sich so treu die Geschichte des französischen Dramas wieder", sounds very plausible; but the division of the different phases through which the French stage has to pass, was made by Dannheisser to suit the theory, I suspect. For instance, I fail to see that there is a "predominance of the tragi-comedy from 1620-1625"; Théophile's 'Thisbe', certainly an epoch-making work, is a tragedy, and Racan's 'Bergeries' represents a pastoral poem.

Having followed in this paper the maxim, "*medio tutissimus ibis*", I will sum up my observations by advocating the following position for our poet:

Mairet is a dramatist of considerable talent which is shown in his 'Sylvie', a pastoral that held the popular favor although the author was but twenty-one years of age; in 'Virginie' which was written in 1632. 'Sophonisbe' however, written in 1633, evinces the highest order of the poet's ability. His characteristic ambition was to cater to the taste of the cultured class, with whom Italian poetry was then in high favor, which confirms the theory

that 1629 was the period when his 'Silvanire' was written. Had he only been endowed with enough genius to illustrate successfully the superiority of classic rule, he would have been the hero of the hour. His rival, Corneille, appears with a more pleasing comedy and Mairet abandons the field of pastoral, but with the determination of becoming the poet *par excellence* with the advocates of classic rule, he produces 'Sophonisbe'. In 1633, Mairet considered himself more successful than Corneille, but this feeling became one of bitter opposition when Corneille produced his 'Cid'. Our poet's star was waning; his mission was at an end; however, he had been an important factor in the movement to abandon the popular free romantic drama, and to create a French classic poetry.

In conclusion, permit me to say that it would be highly interesting to enter into a detailed study of the contest for supremacy between Mairet and Corneille (1629-1637). It has been my object here to show the importance of carefully establishing the chronology which must naturally invite attention to the many problems relating to this chapter of French Literature.

### REFERENCES:

BIBLIOTHÈQUE du théâtre français. Dresden, 1768.

DANNHEISSER (ERNST), Zur Chronologie der Dramen Mairet's (*Romanische Forschungen*, v. Bd., 1 Heft, pp. 37-59).

——— Zum Schlusskapitel von Adolf Ebert's Entwicklungsgeschichte der französischen Tragödie (*Romanische Forschungen*, iv Bd., 2 Heft, pp., 310-317).

EBERT, Entwicklungsgeschichte der frz. Tragödie. Gotha, 1856.

GUIZOT, Corneille et son temps, Paris, 1865.

MARTY-LAVEUX, Œuvres de P. Corneille. Paris, 1862.

NICERON, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres. Paris, 1972.45, Vols. xv, xvi, xxiii, xxv.

PETITOT, Répertoire du Théâtre Français. Paris, 1803.

TASCHEREAU, Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de P. Corneille. Paris, 1855.

JULIUS BLUME.

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.